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INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 7670  
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RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 6332  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC  
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RUEIDN/DNI WASHINGTON DC  
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 8033  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 8315  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 000995

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/15/2017  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SOCI](#) [PINR](#) [KISL](#) [IN](#)  
SUBJECT: BHARAT BALLOT 09: CHARGE DISCUSSES NATIONAL  
ELECTIONS IN LUCKNOW

REF: NEW DELHI 960

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Peter Burleigh for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

¶1. (C) Summary: Charge d'Affaires Burleigh discussed the national elections with journalists, local politicians and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mayawati's deputy during a visit to the state capital, Lucknow, on May 4. The journalists generally agreed that Mayawati's popularity has declined since she swept to power in the 2007 state assembly elections. They predicted her Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) would win roughly 20-30 of UP's 80 seats in parliament. Shashank Shekhar, Mayawati's Cabinet Secretary, independently seconded this estimate, stating that even 25-30 seats would "make a difference" in government formation, though he did not make a formal prediction. At the beginning of the campaign two months ago, the BSP had been hopeful of winning 40-50 seats, and perhaps claiming the Prime Minister slot for Mayawati. It appears those expectations have diminished considerably. Shekhar did not believe Mayawati would become Prime Minister after this election cycle. The local politicians from each of the four major parties in UP - Congress Party, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), BSP, Samajwadi Party (SP) - debated the merits of national versus regional parties and agreed that the likely post-poll alliances were BJP-BSP and Congress Party-SP. End Summary.

Journalists See Uptick for National Parties  
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¶2. (U) At a roundtable with Lucknow editors from four of India's major dailies, all agreed that Mayawati's BSP would not win the 40-50 parliamentary seats the UP Chief Minister had initially hoped. While her Dalit votebank remains intact, the Brahmin support she received during the 2007 assembly polls has eroded, reported Sunita Aron of the Hindustan Times. Both the Congress Party and the BJP would improve on their rather lackluster 2004 results of nine and eleven respectively. According to Times of India editor Atul Chandra the SP's embrace of former BJP Chief Minister Kalyan Singh has put many Muslims off the SP and sent them back to the Congress Party. Additionally, the mini-drama surrounding Varun Gandhi's anti-Muslim remarks would help galvanize BJP cadres, the group agreed.

¶3. (U) To a question about election issues, Tavishi Shrivastava of the Pioneer commented that none of the candidates were talking about development. Caste and community identity considerations were all that mattered. The journalists agreed the campaign had been without broad themes and had failed to capture the imagination of the electorate. This, along with furnace-like heat and strict enforcement of new campaign rules by the Election Commission contributed significantly to voter apathy. But even with an increase in support for the national parties, the consensus opinion was the Mayawati's BSP would still win the largest number of seats from UP, approximately 25-30.

#### Local Politicians Toe Party Lines

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¶4. (U) At a lively discussion over lunch, politicians from each of the four major parties in UP stuck close to their scripts. Ashok Bajpai of the BSP led off by denouncing the Congress Party as a total failure. While the three others agreed, Congress Party politician Primod Tiwari soon found himself in a rhetorical "national party" alliance with the BJP's Rajesh Pandey. Both argued the merits of all-India parties and blamed regional parties for opportunistically exploiting identity politics. The group didn't agree on anything, but all acquiesced that after the polls the Congress Party would likely receive the support of the SP, while the BSP would likely partner with the BJP.

#### Mayawati Deputy Confirms

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#### BSP's Lowered Expectations

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¶5. (C) Shashank Shekhar, UP Cabinet Secretary and one of Mayawati's top deputies told CDA that he did not expect Mayawati to become Prime Minister in this election (reftel). When asked for his sense of the election, Shekhar also noted an increase in support for the Congress Party and the BJP. While he would not directly speculate how many seats the BSP would win, he did state that 25-30 would "make a difference" in government formation. Earlier in the campaign, BSP politicians had openly spoke of winning 40-50 seats, and possibly making Mayawati the first Dalit Prime Minister.

#### National Parties Doing Just Well Enough to Clip Mayawati's Wings

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¶6. (C) Comment: After numerous visits to UP and discussions with journalists, politicians, academics, business people and religious leaders it appears the two national parties will survive in the Hindi heartland for now. For decades after independence UP was the stronghold of the Congress Party. In 1998 the BJP won 57 of 80 seats in UP. But now both national parties are struggling to maintain a presence. Credit for the perceived mini-resurgence however, goes more to voter fatigue with do-nothing regional parties than to any strategic plan from the Congress Party or the BJP. Both are still likely to finish in third or fourth place but will not face the ignominy of a wipeout. Politics in UP remains rife with corruption and without a long term vision from any party beyond the shackles of caste identity. End Comment.  
BURLEIGH